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THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS.

"The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." Acts, 11 : 26.

About eighteen hundred years ago, there arose in Judea a certain sect, or religious community, the members of which were at first called by various names. Their founder was Jesus of Nazareth, whom they denominated the Christ, or the Anointed of God, and in whom they trusted as the Saviour foretold by prophets through a long course of ages. They called themselves "brethren," "disciples," "believers," and sometimes "saints," or holy persons. Among the Jews they were known by many appellations of contempt; they were called "Galileans," "Nazarenes," and whatever else could help to turn against them vulgar prejudice and passion. The sect, though every where spoken against, made rapid progress among the Jews; and some ten or twelve years after the crucifixion of its Founder, Gentiles began to be numbered among its converts, and flourishing assemblies of believers were soon formed in many of the great cities of the Roman empire.

Among the earliest and most important of these societies, or churches, was the one formed at Antioch. That city was the metropolis of Syria, and of all the east. It was a city of great

wealth and splendor, inferior only to Rome and Alexandria ; renowned through the world, not only for the natural beauty of its situation, and the magnificence with which art had adorned it, and the genius and learning which centred there, but also for its luxury and Syrian profligacy. In its groves and temples the idols of Greece and Egypt, as well as the Astarte and Thammuz of ancient Syrian worship, were adored with the fanatic zeal of oriental devotion. There, amid the shrines of that idolatry, the new faith gained footing among the Greeks by the efforts of a few disciples whom the storm of persecution had driven forth from Jerusalem and Judea. Thither the church of Jerusalem, as soon as they were informed of the opening thus made, sent Barnabas to carry on the work. There Barnabas, having secured the co-operation of the young Saul of Tarsus, then not long since converted to that faith, labored with great success, gathering and teaching the first church that ever was gathered from among the Gentiles. And there it was that a new name was given to the new sect, a name first spoken, probably, in ignorance, and scorn, and hate—there the disciples were first called christians.

It seems probable, I say, that this name was first applied to the new sect by its enemies. There are only two instances beside the text in which the New Testament records the name. In the text, you observe, it is not spoken of as a name which the disciples selected and adopted for themselves, but only as a name which came into use. In another instance, king Agrippa, moved by the fervent appeal of the prisoner on whom he was sitting in judgment, is represented as exclaiming, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a christian!" In one instance, too, the Apostle Peter, writing to the disciples throughout Asia Minor, and forewarning them of the fiery trial which was soon to try them, while he says, "Let none of you suffer as an evil doer," adds, "Yet if any man suffer as a christian, let him not be ashamed." "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye."

But though this name was first given as a name of reproach, to designate the followers of one who had died a death of ignominy, the disciples, determined as they were to know nothing but "Christ and him crucified," soon adopted it themselves, as a distinctive appellation both convenient and significant. The new

religion, despised and persecuted, held on its way ; ere long it numbered among its converts nobles and philosophers, as well as myriads of those in lowlier conditions ; and ultimately emperors enrolled themselves as its disciples. The name of christian gradually became, in the view of the world, too dignified for contempt ; afterwards it rose above the reach of persecution ; and at last not only were the associations incidentally connected with it varied, but its whole meaning was materially changed. And where at this day—after all the reforms of the last three hundred years—has the word been carried back completely to its original signification ?

I propose, therefore, to inquire a little into the original meaning of this word. What sort of people were they, who were called christians first at Antioch ? The answer can be given satisfactorily only from the Scriptures of the New Testament. If we look to any later documents, we may find the word already beginning to lose its primitive import. I answer then,

I. They to whom this title was originally applied were, in the language of the text, "*disciples*." A disciple is a learner—a pupil under the direction of his teacher. The apostles and other constant attendants on Jesus Christ during his life-time, were called his disciples or pupils ; they neither claimed nor desired any other title. That word described exactly the relation then subsisting between them and their Master, just as it described the relation between Gamaliel and those who sat at his feet to be instructed in the learning of the Jews. Jesus was literally their teacher : they were in his school ; they were his humble, inquiring, believing pupils ; they were learning that which the Divine Word had come from heaven to teach them ; and they made that study a serious and stated employment. After their Master was taken from them, they themselves undertook—being guided by that "other Comforter," (*παράκλητος*, helper, teacher,) "even the Spirit of truth"—to communicate to others that of which they were still, in their own estimation and profession, learners. All whom they were able thus to add to their number, were, like themselves, *disciples*, intent on learning that of which Jesus, the Son of God, was the great teacher. The assembly, or church, at Antioch was strictly a company

of fellow-disciples ; their church was a school in which all were learners, a school under the tuition of Barnabas, and Saul, and others as elder pupils, yet superintended and illuminated by the Holy Spirit.

This, then, was one common characteristic of those who were first called christians ; they were all learners—all disciples. None of them were too wise to learn, none too ignorant to be instructed. There were, indeed, "first principles" of the doctrine of Christ, which all were expected to know ; but from these first principles all—not here and there a favored individual, but all—were expected to "go on toward perfection." There was no seal upon the book of knowledge ; its bright pages were open to all. In that school there was no distinction, such as Greek philosophers and Jewish rabbies had recognized between the few to whom knowledge could be safely intrusted, and the many who were to be only sparingly instructed—no distinction between doctrines esoteric and secret for the wise, and doctrines exoteric for the vulgar—no despotism over unthinking souls built on the cruel dogma that ignorance is the mother of devotion. All in the school of Christ—not a select order, but the pupils generally—were "enriched by him in all utterance and in all knowledge," and the Spirit given to them was "the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him." The system of the men who were first called christians, was a system, not of forms and ritual observances, nor of polity, but of instruction, of knowledge, of faith ; it was "the word," "the glad tidings," "the light," "the truth as it is in Jesus ;" its great ordinance was preaching, its great power was the power of instruction. The christian was indeed a priest, of a royal priesthood ; but it was to offer spiritual sacrifices. He was a citizen, but his citizenship (Phil. 3 : 20) was in heaven. He was a subject, but in a kingdom not of this world. His first character was that of a disciple, a believing learner, an inquirer after truth, not groping and feeling by himself, if haply he might find it, but taught from living oracles.

II. These men, as disciples, held *a certain system of religious doctrines peculiar to themselves*. Of course the limits of the

present inquiry will not permit a particular and full enumeration of their doctrines. It is obvious, however, and cannot easily be denied, that their doctrines were in fact such as distinguished them from both Jews and Gentiles. The Jews they regarded indeed as having received of old the oracles of God, who in time past spake to their fathers by the prophets; but at the same time they regarded themselves as having received from the same God some new and important communications of truth, by his Son. What truths these were has been strangely disputed. It has been supposed by some that the distinctive doctrines received by those who were first called christians, are simply the unity of God and the immortality of the soul. But were not both of these truths as current among the Jews of that day as they now are among us? Did not the Jewish nation, excepting only the inconsiderable sect of the Sadducees, believe, as firmly as we do, the future existence of the human soul in a state of retribution? How then could these doctrines be the distinctive points of the system held by christians? No; the apostles themselves, in their writings, give a palpably different account of this matter. Christ was no to them their master only, and the first promulgator of the faith which they had embraced; his person, his work, and his relations to the vast empire of God, were the great themes of that revelation of which they were the ministers. Christ was the centre of their system—Christ the brightness of the Father's glory, humbling himself for some great end, taking upon himself the form of a servant, and found in fashion as a man—Christ crucified, and dying for our offences—Christ rising from the dead, and exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to sit at the right hand of the Majesty on high, and to give repentance and the remission of sin—Christ the Judge of the world, the Lord, the Jehovah, who shall judge the living and the dead at his appearing. The doctrine of redemption and salvation by Christ, of pardon and cleansing for sinners through his blood—the doctrine of the cross—was to them the Gospel, the glad tidings to be published to all nations. Their own definition of their doctrine was this, "to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them." The confession of their faith was, "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance,

that Christ came into the world to save sinners." In their instructions and inquiries they were "determined to know nothing but Christ and him crucified"—"whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare His righteousness that He might be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." This doctrine was to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness; but they who were first called christians gloried in it as the wisdom of God and the power of God to salvation.

I may be permitted here to throw out a thought which the time will not allow me to illustrate. What is christianity? What does it undertake to reveal? Philosophy recognizes God as a first cause, the ultimate reason why things are; it speculates about the mode of God's existence, and the mode of created existence, and the mode of the dependence of created things on the first cause of all things; it wearies itself upon the problem of reconciling fate and the certainty of acts with the freedom of the agent; it argues about the will, whether it is self-determined or determined by causes external to the mind; but all these points are only remotely, if at all, connected with the doctrine embraced by those who were first called christians. Such questions do indeed make a great figure in the theology of many modern christians; but how remote is all this metaphysical jangling from the grand principles of the doctrine of Christ. To say of the christian revelation, that it reveals God as the first cause of all things, and that it refers all things to his power as the primal ground of all existence and of all change;—still more, to affirm that instead of simply assuming, without any metaphysical explanation, this first element of natural theology, it is a revelation of the mode in which created things depend on the first cause,—is to turn the mind away from the whole scope and substance of the doctrine of the cross. No; christianity is a revelation which respects primarily and chiefly the *moral* character, or what is the same thing, the *moral government* of God. To say that it reveals God's mercy, his placability, and the possibility of a reconciliation to him, is entirely an inadequate representation. It reveals God as holy, as just, as maintaining a moral government; and yet, in perfect consistency with the interests of that

moral government, forgiving and saving the guilty. It reveals forgiveness for sinners, not as a thing of course, the universal law of the Divine administration, but as the result of a peculiar arrangement "into which angels desire to look." Innumerable intimations from nature, and from the course of God's dealings with men here, the innumerable healing and recovering influences by which the sinner is surrounded in this life, afford a strong presumption that sinners in this world are under a dispensation of forgiveness. But the christian revelation not only changes that presumption into a certainty, but makes known the consistency of that peculiar dispensation under which God has placed this world, with the vast government of law and authority which he maintains over all worlds; it reveals God in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and at the same time it commands all men every where to repent, because God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by Christ. The doctrine, then, embraced by those who were first called christians, was new. Paganism had no image of it; philosophy had never conjectured it; the inspiration of the Old Testament had given only some prophetic shadows and faint glimmerings of that which was to come. The idea of God in Christ reconciling the world to himself, just and yet justifying the sinner; the idea of a forgiving God, a redeeming God, and yet a God awful in the glory of his holiness, and swaying the universe of his intelligent creatures by the manifestation of his eternal and inflexible rectitude as moral governor; this is the grand and peculiar idea of the christian revelation.

III. To those who were first called christians, the religious doctrines which they had received were powerful springs of action, *marking their character with strong peculiarities*. The doctrines which they learned in the school of Christ, and concerning Christ, were not to them matters of mere speculation and discussion, held by them as a philosophic sect. If their own testimony may be received; if the manner of their exhibiting and treating these doctrines is to be at all considered, the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel were, to the believers who were first called christians, powerful, sustaining, animating, controlling

principles of action. "The love of Christ," they said, "constraineth us;" "he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live to themselves, but to Him who died for them." "Whatsoever is born of God," they say, "overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." "By the cross of Christ," says one of them, "the world is crucified to me, and I to the world." Accordingly their testimony was, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new." A striking proof of our position, that the character of these men was powerfully influenced by the doctrines which they embraced, is found in the fact that wherever the new religion found an entrance, there it occasioned much excitement. Every where the outcry was made, "The men that have turned the world upside down have come hither also." The converts to the new faith were hated, despised, and persecuted; they were deemed the filth and offscouring of all things. How could this have been if they had not been distinguished by great and manifest peculiarities of character?

IV. One of these peculiarities was an *extraordinary strictness and purity of conduct*. It was this, in the opinion of an apostle, which exposed them so much to the hatred of the world; "All they that will live GODLY in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." They considered themselves as called to be SAINTS; as "chosen of God" "before the foundation of the world, that they should be HOLY, and WITHOUT BLAME before him in love;" and as under the strongest bonds to exhibit accordingly a sanctification of the heart in a consistent sanctity of life. "The time past of our lives," says one of them, addressing himself to those who had obtained like precious faith, "may suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banqueting, and abominable idolatries; wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you." To the greatest strictness, and as some would say, severity of manners, the teachers of these christians uniformly exhorted them. Nothing was so sure to awaken the anxiety, and bring down the reproofs

of their watchmen and guides, as any deviation in this respect. "Abstain from all appearance of evil." "Be not conformed to the world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." "Be ye holy in all manner of conversation." "I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul."

This moral purity was one great end of the organization by which they were united. They had not only their assemblies to which all who were disposed to hear their doctrines and to be spectators of their public devotions had free access, but also some tie of association uniting those who recognized each other as disciples and followers of Christ. Linked together by this bond, they were brethren of the household of faith, bound to render to each other all the offices of enlightened brotherly affection, and particularly to help each other in their exposure to temptation, and in their progress towards moral perfection. They were members of a society in which each one was to contribute all in his power for the advancement of all the others in holiness of heart and life, considering one another, to provoke to love and good works, exhorting one another, looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness spring up to trouble them, and thereby many be defiled; lest there be among them any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of bread sold his birthright. And when they found such an one in their fellowship, they, his recognized brethren, his compeers, becoming convinced that he was a deceiver or an apostate, withdrew themselves from him, and by their action he was excluded from their hallowed association. It was the function of the brotherhood to "judge them that were within" the encircling pale of their fellowship, and it was theirs to "put away from among themselves that wicked person." And when the censure thus inflicted of many was followed by manifest repentance on the part of the offender, then, and not till then, it was theirs to forgive him, and to confirm their love towards him. Thus it was that those who were first called christians were characterized by the strictest moral purity.

V. In connection with this, it may be observed that they were

greatly addicted to prayer, and other exercises of devotion. They being followers of Jesus Christ, it could not well be otherwise with them. Nothing in his conduct was more striking than the frequency and earnestness of his communion with Him who heareth prayer. Accordingly, the first thing that we hear of the apostles and other disciples, after the ascension of Christ, is that they all continued in prayer and supplication. We find that the election of a new apostle, their first measure, was attended with acts of devotion. We find them, on the morning of the pentecost, assembled with one accord in one place for devotional exercises. After that memorable day, we find that they and the three thousand who were added to them "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread," (devoutly remembering their Lord,) "and in prayer;" and that they were "daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, praising God." A few days afterwards, when Peter and John, having been brought before the council, were dismissed with many threatenings, we find them all lifting up their voice with one accord in joyful thanksgiving and earnest supplications for grace. We find conversion to their faith described by the expressive words, "Behold he prayeth." As we read the history of the acts of the apostles, and no less when we read the letters of those holy men, we find constant proof how much those who were first called christians abounded in devotion, public and private, "praying always with all prayer," "praying without ceasing," and "not forsaking the assembling of themselves together" for united worship and mutual exhortation.

VI. Another characteristic of those who were first called christians, was their practical and impartial *philanthropy*. I do not use this word in the sense of mere alms-giving, or mere sympathy with human misery. There had already been in the world instances of generosity, of kindness, of public spirit, of admirable self-devotion to one's friends and country; but their philanthropy was a regard for man, not of one particular nation, or condition, or complexion, not as a Jew, not as a Roman, not as a Greek, not as sustaining any particular relation to themselves,—but as a man, as a brother of the human family, as a partaker of human nature,

in its dignity, in its degradation, in its guilt, in its redemption, in its immortality. Every human being was, to them, a partaker of that nature in which the Redeemer had lived, and died, and risen, and ascended to the right hand of God. They proclaimed indeed no war against the order of society; they breathed no fanatical zeal against the distinctions which courtesy recognizes; they quarreled not with the titles of rank and power, "most excellent," "most noble;" but to them, for all that, the emperor was a man, and the slave was a man. The view which filled their minds and directed their human sympathies was, "There is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." There is no difference, "God will have all men to be saved." There is no difference, "Christ gave himself a ransom for all."

The strangeness, newness of their regard for human nature, demands our attention. Look then at one of the men who were first called christians at Antioch. In his travels he has come to Athens, the seat of genius, of learning, of the arts, and proud above every other city of the earth in its ancestral glories. He has walked through its streets—he has looked with a troubled eye on its temples, its altars, its statues—he has discoursed in the synagogues where a few Israelites worship the one God—he has found in the forum opportunities of conference and discussion. And now he stands on one of those "immemorial hills"—all the glory of Athens in his sight. He stands before the famed and venerated court of Areopagus, surrounded with philosophers of every school, the Epicurean, the Peripatetic, those of the porch, and those of the academy, crowding to hear the babbler speak. He speaks of God—one God, the Creator and Ruler of all. He speaks of man; and how? "God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth." How strange to an Athenian! One blood! All nations of one blood! We Greeks—Athenians—sprung from the soil—we of one blood with the Jew and the wild Scythian! What! the Ethiopian or Celtic slave that trembles in my presence, of one blood with me! Such is the scorn that speaks from many a countenance in that assembly.

Nor was such a philanthropy less strange to the Jew than to the Greek. The Israelite, indeed, acquainted with his own Scriptures, knew as a fact the original identity of the human race; but he was

as far as the Athenian from recognizing the fact in his affections and his practice. And hardly any one thing in relation to the origin and first planting of christianity is more marvellous, or more incapable of an infidel solution, than the fact that from among the Jews, abhorring all nations and abhorred of all, there came forth a sect in whose eyes, to whose philanthropy, all distinctions of nation, race and condition, were as nothing. It was by Jews that the doctrine was first preached, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him may not perish, but may have everlasting life." It was a Jew who first announced the conclusion to which he had slowly and reluctantly arrived in the face of the strongest national prejudices: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him."

Thus, among those who were first called christians, it came to be a principle acknowledged and acted upon, that "in Christ is neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all and in all." To them all men alike were men—immortal, responsible, guilty, redeemed; and all believers alike were the sons of God—kings and priests unto God—heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. In the Church, the Israelite, the Roman, and the Greek—the barbarian from Africa or from Britain, and the Scythian from Tartary,—the rich and the poor—the master and his slave, were brethren—all alike cared for each other and for the common interest—the whole "multitude" shared in the deliberations and proceedings which concerned their commonwealth, so humble to the eye of sense, and so august to the eye of faith. There was the school in which was first taught effectually that doctrine, the foundation of all true freedom, or what is the same thing, of all justice and good government among men—that doctrine which is yet to cast down all thrones and to break all fetters—the doctrine of the equality of all men as the rational and immortal offspring of God, as responsible to him, as the objects of his holy watchfulness and his kind regard, as partakers in the shame and ruin of a common apostacy from him, as redeemed by his Son, and as now passing through these scenes of probationary mercy to eternal life or eternal death.

VII. Another trait in the character of those who first bore the

Christian name—of which it is indispensable to take some distinct notice—was their extraordinary *zeal and diligence for the propagation of their religion*. Every one of them had embarked in the gigantic enterprise of carrying the Gospel through the world. Every one of them felt that in receiving the Gospel, with its hopes and its renewing and ennobling influences, he had received it not for himself alone, but for others—a treasure not to be enjoyed in solitary contemplation, but to be communicated and diffused, and still imparted till the world should rejoice in it. The church at Jerusalem, when first gathered, was pervaded by such zeal, there was among the members so much of self-denial and liberality in behalf of their new faith, that all they had was thrown by common consent into a common treasury. As many as were possessors of lands or houses, sold them, and brought the prices and laid them down at the apostles' feet. In other places there was not the same necessity which existed at Jerusalem; but the same spirit was found wherever there were christians. Every where they were prompt to contribute for the common cause. The church at Antioch alone, when churches were feeble, and despised, and small, sent forth two missionaries to preach among the Gentiles. Wherever there was a call for aid, there aid was promptly rendered. The epistles of Paul are full of acknowledgments which prove the liberality of the disciples every where. Those who were first called christians, held all their possessions in trust for Christ and for his Gospel, in the very spirit inculcated by Christ himself: "Whoever he be among you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." They were not only ready to give, but ready to act, and ready to suffer for the Gospel. They took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, nay, they freely surrendered their lives. Laboring in such a spirit, they saw the victories of the Gospel spreading far and wide. The host of believers was continually multiplied, and in a few years, without arms, without political influence, nay, in the face of the power and scorn of the world, in the face of fierce, malignant, fiery opposition from earth and from hell, the greatest revolution was accomplished which the world's history has ever yet recorded.

The subject shows us what men at the present day have the best title to the Christian name. I take it for granted that these characteristics which we find so clearly delineated in the Scriptures, are the proper traits of christian character. I ask then, in the light of

this subject, who are Christians?—who are the legitimate successors of the despised men to whom this name was first applied? Show us the men who are truly disciples,—who make it a business to sit at the feet of Jesus and to hear his words,—who study just what Jesus and his inspired apostles have taught, with the earnestness of eager and inquiring pupils. Show us the men the centre of whose faith is the great and peculiar doctrine of God in Christ; God glorious in holiness, and yet justifying the sinner that believeth. Show us the men on whose hearts and lives this great doctrine and the doctrines to which it is necessarily related, have stamped a deep and clear impression, so that by the cross of Christ they are crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to them. Show us the men who are marked before the world, and disliked by the world for the strictness of their lives, because they undertake to live godly in Christ Jesus; and over whom, whenever any of them fall or seem to fall into any moral delinquency, the world triumphs with malignant exultation. Show us the men who abound in prayer and praise, private, domestic, social—the men who forsake not the assembling of themselves together for devotion, but exhort one another while it is called to-day, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Show us the men who, regarding all men as the offspring of God, the subjects of his moral government, the partakers in one ruin, and redeemed by one great expiation, practically regard the welfare and the rights of all men as of equal value. Show us the men whose lives are marked by an earnest and effective zeal for the salvation of men, and for spreading abroad the knowledge of that name by which alone we can be saved. These are the men that we look for. These are the legitimate successors to the name and honors, as they prove themselves to have inherited the spirit of those who were first called christians. This is the true and only apostolic succession.

The occasion* requires us to address some distinct application of the subject to those who, by their own public and solemn covenant, are now about to be constituted a Church of Christ, and who are to maintain in this house the ordinances of the Gospel.

We trust, brethren, that your church is to be a society of disciples, a school organized according to the mind of Christ for the

* This sermon was delivered at the formation of the Church in the Broadway Tabernacle, New York, on the third of September, 1840.

study and practice of his word. Those great truths, the knowledge of which first came by a miraculous communication from the mind of God, and by the power of which the believer is transformed into the likeness of God, are here, we trust, to be continually expounded and proclaimed. Here is to be maintained, we trust, the purity, the strictness, the holy, heavenly severity of christian character. The selfish, the worldly, the sensual, the light-minded, the impenitent, are to be warned off from the communion of Christ's disciples; and if any such creep into the sacred circle, they are to be disowned and excluded. Here is to be your place for public prayer and communion in holy things,—where God the Father shall be worshipped in the name of his holy Son Jesus,—where sweet songs of praise shall go up to the Author of our redemption from sin,—where Jesus, the eternal Word incarnate, Jesus, the sorrowful, the betrayed, the crucified, the risen, the Almighty Saviour, shall be remembered in the broken bread and the red cup. Here too you are to feed and nourish for continual activity the spirit of a holy and universal philanthropy, and the spirit of a laborious and self-denying zeal for the progress of the Gospel. To all this you pledge yourselves by the solemnities of this evening. Let me then suggest some points of caution and of duty, by the observance of which you may be aided in the performance of your vows.

1. Cherish a lively sense of the paramount importance of the things which have been spoken of as the characteristics of those who were first called christians. Discipleship in the school of Christ—the reception of the great truths taught by Christ and his apostles—the experience of the power of those truths upon the heart—the practical purity and sanctity of the christian life—prayer without ceasing, and in the spirit of adoption and of communion with God—and *with* all these things, and as resulting from them all, a philanthropy like that of the good Samaritan, regarding every human being as a neighbor and a brother—and a zeal like that of the apostles, full of self-denial for the extension of the kingdom of God—these are the things to be cared for first and continually. Where these things are, there is living christianity. Where these things are wanting, there is no christianity. Where forms, formularies, measures, and matters of organization, are exalted above these things, there the spirit and life of christianity are sacrificed to externals and circumstantial. The kingdom of God is not

meat and drink,—not forms of faith, not forms of prayer—not measures and expedients—not discipline and government—but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

2. In due subordination to the essential things of living christianity, maintain the true spirit of christian liberty; and, in order to this, maintain the liberty of the churches. The church is a school for learning the will of Christ; and where the church is, the gathering together of Christ's humble pupils in his name, there he is with his Spirit to teach them. Where the church is, asking counsel of God with prayer, looking humbly for the truth, and refusing to obey any authority but that of the God of truth,—there is liberty, and there a pledge for the world's emancipation. I charge you then, that you call no man master—let no human authority have dominion over your faith. Yield to no body of men, clerical or laic—to no society, of whatever name or character—to no convention, though it be called the world's convention—to no assembly, though it seem like the “General Assembly and Church of the First-born”—yield to no human authority that allegiance which is due only to Christ. Let none command your faith or your obedience, but by showing you the mind of God.

3. Remember that as individuals, and as a church, you bear the name of Christ. You are called Christians. Walk—help each other to walk—worthy of that high and holy calling. There is no name of a party or a sect which is of any moment in comparison with the name of Christ. To honor the name by which any particular church or confederation of churches is distinguished from others, is a small matter. To honor the name of Christ, the author and finisher of our faith, and the Redeemer of our souls, is the great thing. If you fail to maintain the purity and spiritual prosperity of your church, the grief, the shame will be, not that the name of Congregationalism is dishonored—not that the name of the Puritan New England Churches is dishonored—not that the hallowed and cherished memory of our pilgrim ancestors is dishonored—but that the name of Christ is dishonored. Shall that name which is above every name,—the name before which every knee should bow, and every tongue break forth in praise—shall it be dishonored on your account? Never forget that the name which you bear is the name of Christ.

One word, in conclusion, addressed to each and all. Are you a christian, in the true and primitive meaning of that word? Those primitive christians were in the right; and if you are like them in these essential characteristics, you are in the right. They were safe—with the world in arms against them—with the fire and the sword of persecution flashing in their faces, they were safe; and if you are like them, you are safe. They have attained, and are now enjoying, an inheritance in comparison with which the diadem of the Cæsars was a bauble; and if you are like them, that inheritance will soon be yours.

SERMON CCCII.

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WHAT IT IS TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN.

"And they said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house."—Acts, 16 : 31-34.

Here is the description of a change which took place in a man, who, a few moments before, was at the point of committing suicide; his drawn sword in his hand to pierce his own vitals, that thus—not fearing the wrath of the eternal Judge—he might flee from the vengeance of an earthly despot to whom he was under a military accountability. Through God's mercy his mad intention was defeated. Thus rebuked, he listened trembling to the words of life, and immediately he believed. In the ordinance of baptism, he professed his faith and was recognized as a believer. Thenceforth he was, in the common phrase of the apostles and primitive

believers, "in Christ." That is to say, he was a christian, in the true and spiritual meaning of that word.

What was the change through which that man then passed? To this inquiry the present discourse is devoted. What is it to become a christian? What is that change in the mind and character, which takes place at the commencement of a christian life? We consider the change simply as an event in the history of the man, a phenomenon occurring in his mental experience, and the question is, what is it?

This question I would consider in the simplest manner possible. Without inquiring what distinctions sectarian or partizan theologians have made, distinctions which may be of value in their proper place, I would look directly into the Scriptures, and see what they teach. What is it to become a christian?

We may pursue the inquiry before us by two distinct processes, both of which are simple, intelligible, and entirely Scriptural. The question, What is it to become a christian? may be answered with perfect propriety, by showing from the Scriptures what it is to be a christian; for to become a christian is simply to *begin to be* such an one as the Scriptures teach us to call by that high and holy name. Or the same question may be answered by exhibiting the more direct testimony of the Scriptures, and carefully comparing the various words and phrases which are used by the sacred writers for the express purpose of describing that change, the commencement of a christian life. Both these methods will be employed in the present discourse.

I. We may learn what is the change which takes place when a man becomes a christian, by inquiring from the Scriptures what it is to be a christian.

And here—in order to prevent and obviate some vague objections to this process, which may, perhaps, arise in such minds as are accustomed to other methods more scholastic and metaphysical—let it be remarked, that we understand what any particular change is, just when we fully know the phenomena of the change, or, in plainer words, the facts in which it consists. The change is one thing, the power by which it was wrought is another thing, and its connection with a thousand other events is another thing. The change is an event—a plain matter of fact, and may be altogether understood, even while its causes and its connections are very imperfectly apprehended, and are matters of speculation and inquiry. There lies before you a mass of ice. As you stand in the sunshine, and with the south wind breathing softly upon you, you see the mass dissolved. Here is a change. That which existed in one form exists in another form. That which was a solid is now a fluid. This fact is all the change, and the more perfectly you understand this fact, the more perfectly you understand the

change. You may examine and analyse the fact—you may learn more minutely the properties of the solid, and the properties of the fluid—you may observe the solid down to the instant when its properties as a solid ceased to exist, and the fluid at the very instant at which it begins to flow—and after all, the change of the substance from a solid to a fluid consists in the simple fact that it *was* the one, and is the other. This the child knows, who sees the change, and more than this the philosopher cannot know. The only difference between the child and the philosopher, on this point, is that the latter knows better than the former what is a solid and what is a fluid. You may ask many questions about the change—you may inquire by what power and instrumentality it was effected—you may trace its connection with innumerable other events and operations, with the rising of the fountains and the swelling of the torrents, with the coming on of longer days, and brighter sunshine, and warmer breezes, with the shooting forth of vegetation, with the revolution of the earth in its orbit. You may look for the class of changes to which this particular act most properly belongs, and for the law of universal nature under which it has occurred. You may consider how it stands related to the power, the wisdom, and the benignity of the great Author of creation and of providence. But all these inquiries into the relations and connections of the change, are entirely distinct from the question, what is the change; and, indeed, they all presuppose, in the inquirer, a knowledge of the proper answer to that question; for how can any man intelligently look for the relations and bearings of an event, which event is to him unknown?

So in respect to the particular subject before us—the change which takes place when a man becomes a christian. We speak now of the nature of the change, and of that simply. We are not to inquire at all into the power and influence by which it is effected, or into any of its connections with the purposes of God, or with the scheme of his moral government. The question about the change is not, How is it? or, Why is it? but simply, What is it? The answer is, in general terms, the man who was not a christian begins to be a christian. This fact is the change, and if we understand this fact clearly—that is, if we understand clearly what it is *not* to be a christian, and what it is to *be* one—then we understand the change precisely. Tell me from the Scriptures what is a christian—tell me how far and in what respects the christian differs from other men, and you have told me just what change has taken place in that man, you have told me how far and in what respects he differs from his former self.

To this part of the inquiry, therefore, we now turn. What is it, according to the Scriptures, to be a christian?

1. A christian is one who believes the Gospel. "He that believeth shall be saved." "We walk by faith and not by sight."

"Whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." It is unnecessary to repeat the quotations which might be made on this point. They all amount to this,—he who is truly a christian, is one who takes the christian religion as his rule of life, and who acts habitually with a thoughtful regard to all the disclosures of the word of God. This is one of the first and most striking peculiarities of the christian as such, and this is no small part of the change which took place when he became a christian. In that hour he ceased to treat the oracles of God with that neglect and practical rejection with which he had always treated them before, and began to look at the things which are not seen, and to act on the principle, that all the word of God is unerring and momentous truth.

2. A christian is a disciple and follower of Christ. How often the word disciple is used in the New Testament as the distinctive appellation of christians—how often christians are spoken of as believing on Christ, owning him as their master and teacher, and following his example—I need not show. What is it then to be a disciple and follower of Christ? It is obviously to adopt his principles; to receive all his declarations and doctrines as truth, and as truth of infinite importance; to imbibe his spirit and tread in his steps, and to be devoted with the zeal of a partizan to his honor and the advancement of his cause. This then is the characteristic of the christian. This is one point wherein he differs from other men and from his former self; and this is one point of the change which took place in him when he began to be a christian. At that crisis he began to be the disciple and follower of Christ.

3. A christian is a penitent sinner. To him, and to none other, belong the blessings pronounced by Jesus on the poor in spirit, and on those that mourn. In what terms does Paul speak of himself as "less than the least of all saints,"—as having been "a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious;" and with how much meaning does he testify, "this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." I need not spend time to argue, that this is the characteristic spirit of a christian. This is the poverty of spirit, the mourning, the meekness, which Christ pronounces blessed. Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Those, therefore, whom he calls and calls effectually—those who are his—are all penitent sinners like Paul. The christian is one who acknowledges himself a sinner—one who does not profess, or think to stand before God in any other light than that of a rebel surrendering himself, and trusting only to the mercy of his sovereign. He is one who thinks very meanly of himself on account of his sins, and who takes a pleasure in humbling himself before God. He is one who strives habitually against sin as

against a deadly and horrible evil, and whose ambition and earnest purpose is to escape the pollution that is in the world through lust. This is one particular which distinguishes him from what other men are, and from what he himself once was. This, then, is one particular of the change which took place when he became a christian. Then first, he heartily owned himself a sinner before God. Then first, he gave up his efforts to excuse and hide his guilt. Then first in all his life-time, yielding to the convictions of his conscience, he said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord. Then first, he renounced his perverse and rebellious disposition, and began to long and strive in earnest to be purified from sin.

4. A christian is one who depends on the atonement and intercession of Christ for pardon and final salvation. He receives it as a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ came into the world to save sinners. He is always ready to say with the holy Stephen, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. He has committed his all to that Saviour, and he knows that such a Saviour is able to keep that which he has committed unto him. This trait of character—this giving the soul to Christ for present reconciliation to God, and for final salvation—this living on Christ, in his office as Redeemer and advocate, is peculiar to the christian; and when first he thus entrusted himself to the power and mercy of the Saviour, at that precise juncture he began to be a christian, and that was the change.

5. A christian is one who freely yields himself to be governed and led, taught and sanctified, by the Spirit of God. The ungodly "do always resist the Holy Ghost;" while, on the contrary, "those who are in Christ Jesus," "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." The men of one sort mind the things of the flesh, the others mind the things of the Spirit. "If ye through the Spirit," says Paul to the Romans, "do mortify the deeds of the flesh, ye shall live; for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." "Walk in the Spirit," says the same apostle to the Galatians, "and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh." "They that are Christ's," he subjoins, "have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." A great point then, in the change by which the christian became what he now is—a great point in the difference between what he is and what he was—is this: once he walked after the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; but in the hour in which he became a christian, in that hour he began to walk after the Spirit—in that hour he gave over his resistance of the Holy Ghost, and yielded the citadel of his heart to be occupied and possessed by the Spirit of God and of Christ—in that hour he gave himself up to be led by the Spirit, to walk

in the Spirit, to be sanctified and sealed by the influences of the Spirit, and to be thenceforth the temple of the Holy Ghost.

But we have pursued this part of our inquiry as far as our limits will allow, and far enough to give a definite and satisfactory answer to the question, What is the change which constitutes the commencement of the christian life? Other particulars, and other aspects of christian character, as distinguished from the common character of other men, might be presented; but the essential and comprehensive views have already been exhibited; and, as these views, to a great extent, obviously include each other, so, taken together, they include all the traits and features characteristic of such as shall be saved. Wherein, then, consists that change by which a man becomes a christian? Why, it consists in this, that he begins to believe the word of God, and to treat all its declarations and disclosures as deserving his most serious and practical attention; and in this, that he gives himself to Christ as a disciple, and a devoted and active follower; and in this, that whereas he has heretofore been a perverse and persevering sinner, he now begins humbly to acknowledge his guilt, and to live as a penitent sinner, struggling against temptation and longing to be purified; and in this, that he casts himself upon God's mercy, and begins to build all his hopes of present forgiveness and final salvation on the great atonement and the powerful intercession of Christ; and in this, that having long resisted the Holy Ghost, he yields to that divine and blessed influence, and begins to walk after the Spirit. This is the change which constitutes a man a christian. This is the change by which you must become a christian, or else you must die in your sins.

II. It now remains to notice more rapidly, the various Scriptural expressions by which this same change is directly described.

1. The change is often called *believing* generally, or *receiving the Gospel*. Particular instances of this I need not adduce. But what does such an expression mean, as applied to denote this change? It means that when the man yields his heart to the reception and belief of the word of God—that is when he begins to believe—then he becomes a christian.

2. The change is often called *coming to Christ*, as in this declaration of the Saviour, "All that the Father giveth to me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out;" or in this, "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life." This expression manifestly means, coming to Christ as a teacher, and Saviour, and Lord,—that is, beginning to be his disciple and follower. And this, if there is any meaning in the words of the Saviour just cited—this coming to Christ, is that change which ensures to the sinner the blessings of salvation, and without which no man can see life.

3. The change is frequently called *repentance*; as where it is said, "God also hath granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life;" or, as in the exhortation, "Repent and be baptized for the remission of your sins." The word thus used, obviously implies that the sinner begins to be a christian by beginning to be penitent.

4. Sometimes the change is called *conversion* or *turning*; that is, the turning of the sinner to God. Thus God says by his prophet, "Turn ye, for why will ye die?" and by the apostle, using a word of the self-same significancy, "Be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." Now what is this turning to God, for the remission of sins, and for deliverance from death? To whom does the sinner turn, when by his turning he finds forgiveness and becomes an heir of life? To whom but God in Christ? To whom but to that God who so loved the world that he sent his Son, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him may be saved? What then is this conversion, this turning to God, but the abandonment of self-righteousness and self-will, and self-seeking, and the surrender of the soul to God's method of salvation? What is it but the casting of the soul, in contrition, in humility, in self-consecration, in ardent desires after holiness, upon Jesus Christ as an Almighty Saviour?

5. Not unfrequently the change is called by such figurative titles as regeneration or *being born again*, becoming a new creature, being renewed, passing from death to life; and especially in view of that interposition of Divine mercy, and those influences of the Holy Spirit by which it is accomplished, and of which it is not our purpose here to speak; it is called a being born of God, or a being born of the Spirit. These strong expressions are all employed to describe the greatness and comprehensiveness of the change. Nor are they—nor can they be—too strong for the purpose. What change can be greater than that in which a man comes for the first time and for ever under the controlling power of things invisible and eternal—that in which he joins himself to the standard and cause of Christ as the Captain of his salvation—that in which he begins to repent of his sins against God, and turns to a new obedience—that in which he learns to hope for forgiveness and salvation through the blood of God's own Son—that in which he sweetly, joyfully, and for ever yields himself to be led, governed and sanctified by the indwelling Spirit of God? What change can be greater than this? It introduces him to a state of reconciliation and friendship with the King Eternal. It makes him a fellow-servant with angels; an heir of heaven; a child of God; beloved by Him before whom angels, awe-struck, veil their faces; guarded and guided by that power which sways the universe; and holding constant intercourse with the Father of Spirits, the King immortal and invisible. All this is included in that change which takes place when the man, minding the things of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, dead in trespasses and sins, con-

demned already, and marked as an heir of wrath, becomes a christian. Is it not a new birth—a new era of life—the dawning of a new existence? Is it not worthy to be called a new creation? is not he a new creature with whom old things have thus passed away and all things have become new? Is it not life from the dead—is it not a passing from death to life—when he whom hell was yawning to devour, is plucked from its opening gate and made an heir of glory?—when he who was in the condemnation, in the helplessness, in the pollution, and corruption, and loathsomeness of moral death, stands up revived, purified, renewed, to rejoice in the light and to move and act in the godlike liberty of the sons of God?

This now is the change to which you are called. This is that change to which the God of grace has so long been striving to bring you. To this change, as that without which you are eternally a lost, and wicked, and ruined spirit,—all the disclosures of God's word, all the dealings of his Providence, all the kind admonitions and pleadings of his Spirit, are continually pointing you. You know substantially what this change is. I repeat it—I affirm it earnestly—I know your conscience affirms it also—you understand essentially the nature of this change. And if you say that you know not what you are to do, or what you can do, to be saved, you deny your own convictions.

You see it is a reasonable change. Its reasonableness is self-testified. You feel upon your conscience the self-evident reasonableness of your passing through that change, through which the Philippian jailor passed in that hour in which he believed. Such a change is as reasonable as it is for the rebel to return to his allegiance; as reasonable as it is that truth should be obeyed, that purity, and virtue, and holiness should be loved; that beneficence should be admired and imitated; or that love, bleeding and dying for you, should provoke your grateful self-consecrating love in return.